

Parks & Recreation Council

LOCATION:
Killens Pond State Park
Killens Pond Road
Felton, DE 19943

Thursday, February 1, 2018
9:30 a.m.

Council Members

Ron Mears, Chairperson
Clyde Shipman
Jim White
Isaac Daniels

Ron Breeding, Vice Chairperson
Joe Smack
Brenda Bramble

Ed Lewandowski

Staff

Ray Bivens, Director
Greg Abbott

Esther Knotts
Cindy Todd

Matt Ritter
Jenn Pase

Matt Chesser
Rachael Phillos

I. Introductions/Announcements

- A. Chairman Ron Mears called the Council meeting to order at 9:30 a.m.
- B. Ray Bivens and Matt Ritter gave an overview of the three-day State Parks Leadership School. Rachael Phillos shared her experience as a former attendee and current enrollees introduced themselves and described their job duties to the Council.

II. Official Business/Council Activities

- A. Approval of Meeting Minutes
Ron Mears asked for Council approval of the November meeting minutes. Ron Breeding made a motion to approve the minutes. Ed Lewandowski seconded the motion. The motion carried unanimously.
- B. Council Member Reports:
 1. Fort Delaware Society – No report was given.
 2. Natural Areas Advisory Council – *Jim White & Ed Lewandowski reported.*
The Committee is trying to raise exposure of natural areas throughout the state. They are reaching out to landowners to raise the Natural Areas Advisory Council's profile. They are seeking to place an article in the *Outdoor Delaware* magazine. At Lums Pond State Park, they are working on trails and property maintenance.
 3. Wildlife Management Committee – *Clyde Shipman reported.*
220 deer were harvested in parks. This is the first year that the total harvest for managed hunts at Brandywine Creek State Park netted less than 30 deer. Jim White stated that Delaware Nature Society is seeing evidence of more deer and there is some evidence of disease.
 4. Resident Curatorship – *Joe Smack reported.*

The program is on hold right now pending a ruling from the Attorney General's office. Ray stated that there was an update yesterday. The Attorney General removed the hold on the program. The program had originally been placed on hold over concerns that these properties may fall under the Landlord Tenant Code. After researching this issue, the Attorney General has released the hold. Joe said that the Division has been working on a bill for legislation to address this issue. Representative Heffernan has expressed interest in assisting the Division with this.

The Resident Curatorship program will be featured in an article in the *Delaware Today* magazine. The article is expected to run in May 2018.

Joe stated that Jim Hall will be a panelist on a New Jersey Historic Preservation Panel discussing topics including curatorship programs.

The properties currently included in the curatorship program are the Warrington House, Lums Mill House, Sarah Brooks House, and the Cleaver House. The properties at Governor Bacon are no longer on our inventory. The Fort Dupont Redevelopment Corporation (FDRC) owns them now.

Matt Chesser shared that he will be meeting with Jeff Randol from the FDRC to discuss the Cleaver House in Port Penn. If this property were renovated, the Division could move interns currently housed at Fort Dupont in to this property. Ron Mears asked about the original funding for this property and Matt stated that this was a 3 phase project. There were funds allotted for the first phase but the funding for the second and third phases never materialized.

5. Delaware Land and Water Conservation Trust Funds – Ray Bivens reported.

Senate Bill 75 moved the funds to active management and 60% of the funds can be invested in equities. The stock market as a whole returned 19% on average. Our investments returned 10.5% which is huge because prior to investing, we were receiving .3%. The Division will have a full grant cycle this year and anticipates a 2% withdrawal which means we will be giving away \$2M in grants for playgrounds and community park improvements.

Last year was the first time a distribution was made from our State Park endowment. That fund grew by 10% as well.

The money is conservatively invested. The Division initially invested \$50M and now has nearly \$60M in the account.

III. Public Comment

There was no public comment.

IV. Staff Reports

1. Policy/Legislation – Ray Bivens reported.

Ray shared the results of the economic impact study. The study showed that Delaware State Parks' economic impact is just under \$400M per year. Without Delaware State Parks, every household in the state would pay an additional \$151.00 per year in taxes. Ed Lewandowski asked how multipliers were used in the study. Ray offered to send him the full report.

The Department is recommended to receive \$4M in capital rehabilitation funds in the Governor's recommended budget. This money will be split between Parks, Fish and Wildlife and other parts of DNREC. This is good news but the Division needs about \$10M annually to make progress on the Division's \$160M capital backlog.

The NVF project is recommended to receive \$2.5M. The Division received the Pisces (Performance and Innovation in the SRF Creating Environmental Success) Award for this project. This is a national award and only five awards are presented each year for innovative projects.

There were no statewide trails funds in the Governor's recommended budget this year; Open Space was recommended for full funding (\$10M) and \$1.3M was included for rehabilitation of the Biden Center. This is not enough to rehab the building but will allow the Division to start working on making the Biden Center a true environmental training center. The intent is to renovate the building so that overnight accommodations will resemble those of a college dormitory. The kitchen is huge but it cannot currently be used for cooking. If the Division updates the kitchen so that groups can cook in it, the building will be more inviting to youth groups, etc.

Ray stated that the Division's revenue generation for the year was strong and that we are "greenlighting" a lot of improvements throughout the State. The Division will be using ASF (special) funds to supplement the equipment and minor capital funds that were not recommended in the Governor's budget.

The Division requested an additional ranger position to work in the southern region of the State. This position would be paid using special funds. The position is included in the Governor's recommended budget. The salary money for this position will be paid for with ASF dollars. This position will be a help because of the huge increase in surf tag sales, camping, and increased visitation. Ron Mears commented that the Division definitely needs more than one ranger.

Ray stated that Council members are welcome to come to the JFC hearing to testify. He clarified that JFC focuses on the operating budget. He stated that the capital budget is handled by the bond bill. Ray stated that three Friends' group presidents have contacted him to express an interest in speaking. Ron Mears shared his past speaking experiences with the Council. Ron Mears asked what bond bill money can be used for. Matt Chesser stated it can be used for major refurbishments but not for salaries.

The Division received word this week that Fort Delaware needs \$3.5M to complete necessary projects (the dock, roads, etc.) The Division only received \$2.1M last year to take care of the entire park system.

Statewide last year, the Friends' groups received over \$1M in grants and donations to match projects throughout the State.

I. **Section Updates** – A handout was provided to the Council and highlights were discussed.

1. Administrative Services – *Greg Abbott shared highlights from the Park Council Report.*

The website was visited by 394,075 visitors. This represents a 7% drop in visitors over last year. Camping and lodging were the second most viewed pages. The new website is in the testing phase and should live in a couple of months.

The 2017 Annual Report is being finalized and should be shared at the next meeting.

In the past quarter, the Division had 77,000 volunteer hours. Last year was a record year for volunteers with 137,000 hours. This is equal to 70 full time employees (FTE's). Greg shared the activities volunteers enjoy helping with.

The Division is very proud of our Veterans Conservation Corps. This year's member, Earl Bowman, was selected as The Corps Network 2018 Corps Member of the Year and 2018 21st CSC Corps Member of the Year. The Division's Volunteer Administrator, Karen Minner, was named as a finalist for the 21st Century Conservation Service Corps Champion of the Year Award.

Ron Mears asked what volunteers are doing at Cape Henlopen this time of year. Greg shared the following examples: trail work, fence work, and working in the nature center. Ray said they are also working at Fort Miles. Greg shared other projects the Veterans' Corps has done throughout parks this year.

Friends groups raise funds and volunteer in many different ways for the Division. Greg shared some of the projects they are working on at this time. The Division is really proud of the projects that are being done by our Friends groups.

Greg outlined the revenue generated by the Big Chill partnership. He stated that this partnership generated a quarter of a million dollars which will "allow the Division to do some things that we otherwise would not have been able to do". Ron Mears asked if there are restrictions on where this money has to be spent. Greg stated that this money like all self-generated revenue is used to fund other parks that are not revenue generating.

2017 was a record breaking year for camping. We are currently running some promotions to bring people to the parks to use other overnight accommodations.

The Request for Proposals (RFP) for the Revenue Management System is due to go out in February. Selection will be made in early fall and the contract will be awarded. Our contract with Active Network will expire in November 2019. Transition will be a huge project.

The new campground store at Cape Henlopen grossed \$129K last year.

We hope to unveil the Division's new brand in the next six months. We are working with Miles Media on this project.

Madison Watkins, the marketing director, has announced her resignation; she will be leaving in March. The Digital Media Manager Abby Shepard will assume those responsibilities until we can post the vacant position.

The number of followers on our social media accounts is up 28% from last year. The Division will be attending one day of the Harrisburg Sportsman Show. We will partner with Cabela's.

Ron Breeding asked how the Winter Wonderfest went. Matt Ritter shared that numbers were down but the Division will be receiving \$30,000. He said that this year the route was changed and additional lights were added so he expects that this event will continue to grow. Greg said that the Division will begin packaging special events so anytime there is a special event, it will be paired with camping.

Council asked what the "Tower 3 lighting is"? (This event is listed in the upcoming events section of the agenda.) Matt shared the details of this restoration project which is being led by the Delaware Seashore Preservation Foundation.

2. **Operations and Programming** – *Matt Ritter shared highlights from the Parks Council Report. Wayne Kline shared information regarding enforcement.*

Matt invited Council to attend the upcoming State Parks School.

Parks' historic mason will be working at Cape Henlopen through the winter while Fort Delaware is closed.

As part of our AZA accreditation at the Zoo, the Division has animals that are part of national breeding programs. These animals are not owned by the Division. The Red Pandas are part of the AZA collection but are housed at the Brandywine Zoo. Our facilities do not allow for breeding of the pandas so when our pandas were ready to breed, they were moved to two other AZA accredited zoos. The Division will be receiving two different Red Pandas to replace those that were moved. The Division hopes that as the master plan and renovations progress at the Brandywine Zoo, we will have the opportunity to breed animals. A breeding program would allow our keepers to expand their knowledge and experience.

Matt encouraged the Council members to take the time to read the kudos included in the handout. Matt commented that our staff is "doing wonderful and impressive things". Jim White complimented Jacquie Williamson on the wonderful job that she and the Fish and Wildlife staff are doing on the Urban Wildlife Project.

Wayne shared information regarding the North Carolina Park Ranger School. This year 80-100 sworn and unsworn officers attended (mostly from east of the Mississippi). Delaware State Parks' rangers teach classes and participate in firearms competitions. Wayne stated that this year Delaware State Park rangers, "pretty much cleaned house" in the competitions. Regional Enforcement Officer Steve Savidge is on the executive board and assists with developing curriculum.

Wayne shared that the Division is exploring a K-9 program for Parks' enforcement. Two rangers have been selected to be handlers. The Division is trying to determine what type of dogs to select and what type of training they will receive. The dogs will generally be used for search and rescue and evidence detection. The training program for handlers is 12 weeks long and it will probably be late summer or early fall before the rangers and dogs go to training. A larger part of their duties will be to do public programming and be "the face of DNREC". Trevor Ditmore from Lums Pond and John Lister from Cape Henlopen were selected to be handlers. Ron Breeding asked how long the Division will keep the dogs. Wayne responded, "as long as they can work". It will depend on the personality of the dog and how much they are used. Wayne said the average is 4, 5, or 7 years but he spoke with a handler last week that worked with a dog for 11 years.

Ron Mears ask the difference between "sworn and non-sworn" rangers. Wayne stated that some States have rangers but these rangers do not have any law enforcement capacity (similar to our park patrol officers).

3. **Planning, Preservation and Development** – *Matt Chesser shared highlights from the Parks Council Report.*

Ron Mears asked if the trail at Cape that was damaged by the hurricane is open. Matt stated that it is.

Bill Miller was hired as a Planner IV and will be responsible for completing the SCORP. Bill will work also work on the White Clay Creek masterplan to complete that project.

Matt again shared that \$10M in Open Space funding has been recommended in the Governor's budget. This is the first time in many years that the program has been fully funded. There are several big projects waiting that will "eat up" that money quickly. In recent years, the Division has been working with donors and scavenging other areas in order to continue to preserve land. There have been two recent land donations; one at Brandywine Creek State Park and one at Auburn Heights.

The Natural Areas program manager is working to make that program more visible. She is developing a website and will be attending the State fair to promote the program.

The first of our historic bridges will be installed. Ray mentioned that, if approved by the Governor, the Division intends to announce our next State Park when the bridge is installed at Auburn Heights. At this time, this location does not have a name but it will encompass the Auburn Valley. Announcing this new park is appropriate now that there are amenities that are open every day. The mansion is open as a special event venue but it is not open every day. However, the rest of the park including the Oversee Trail will be open on a daily basis. There are about 4 miles of trails currently available for use at Auburn Heights. Matt shared the route the trail takes along the quarry and discussed the trailhead and parking lot which will be built by our development partner. The Division has also been working with Delaware Greenways on the project they are working on in Hockessin and when finished, the Tri Valley Trail will connect with their trail system. The Land Trust is working to obtain lands which will link all the properties between the Kennett trail system and Auburn Heights.

There is a lot of African American history in this area. Ron Mears asked if parks received the Garrett Snuff Mill property. Matt stated that the Division has an easement there. The Garrett House is being used for office space right now but it is owned by our development partner so he is working with us on how to protect and interpret that space.

The Auburn Heights park office will open soon.

The Division is working on the Brandywine Zoo masterplan as required by the AZA. This will be a 4-5 year plan. The Division is developing a list of projects to implement, short term and projects for the first year (Phase I) plan. This will be a much needed \$10-\$12M facelift for the Zoo.

Ron Mears asked if Holts Landing is becoming a “high demand” park. Ray stated that it will never be one of our busy parks because of its location but that development around the area has helped with visitation. Matt stated that the park has growth potential. He said that at many of our beach parks, “adding anything causes a lot of concern because we are at capacity” but at Holts we have room to add new amenities without impacting already overburdened areas. Ron Mears asked if Holts will ever develop into “boat dock storage”. Matt said he doesn’t anticipate that happening because the water is too shallow there and dredging is ineffective. Ray stated part of the Sea Hawk Trail along the water at Holts was lost. The Division will be building an elevated boardwalk loop-trail which will be a nice improvement. Currently, there is group camping at the Holts Landing State Park but there is a potential to add other amenities which would appeal to visitors who are looking for a quieter beach experience. Ray stated that before we can add additional public amenities; the Division needs to add staff housing because there is no staff at that location currently. The cost of living at the beach and the lack of staff housing in the area makes it difficult to staff this area. The only staff house in the area is at the marina. The other existing houses are now being marketed as rentals including the house in Dewey which rents during peak seasons for \$4,000 a week. Income from rental houses is being used to fix up staff housing throughout the State.

The project to gut and renovate the bathrooms at Lums Pond has been held up for 6-8 months by the New Castle County permitting office because of the location of the bath house on Smithville Road. DelDOT owns the road but intends to transfer it to the Division when they have a project that requires a land swap. Because the building is not set-back far enough from the DelDOT road, New Castle County is yet to approve the permit. Both agencies sent a letter stating this is becoming a park and that we are not moving the building). The Division has been operating this area for decades through a management agreement with DelDOT. State Park projects do go through facilities management, DNREC agencies, the architectural accessibilities board and then through the counties’ processes. Friends’ groups, in the past, have proposed that the Division be exempted from County codes. The contractor built the White Clay Creek bathroom at their location and is waiting to ship it to us. Because we can’t take delivery and they are storing it for us, they requested that we pay “damages”. In addition, the delay may cause the need for the placement location to be restaged at additional costs.

Matt stated that the same scenario took place at the Blue Ball Barn project. The Division has very few issues with Kent County and none with Sussex County. The NVF project is exempt from County rules because it’s in a flood plain, it’s a contaminated site, and it’s a

historic site. The land use manager from New Castle County suggested that the Division become exempt for the NVF project because there is no flexibility in the rules. Ron Mears asked if this could be dealt with through legislation. Matt stated it could. He also stated that the inflexibility in the New Castle County rules have impacted our resident curatorship program. Matt said the County permitting process also adds delays to projects and has caused constituents who wanted to donate land to decide against it because of the amount of time it takes to go through the process.

VIII. Old Business

Ray shared drafts of our newest Pioneer of Preservation exhibits. Lorraine Fleming will be named a Pioneer of Preservation. Ron Mears said Lorraine is worthy and related a story of Lorraine's speeches at past JFC Hearings.

A consultant was hired to do a feasibility study for the Division and the First State Pickle Ball Club. Several areas are being considered in the Cape Henlopen area; not in the main park but in the Wolfe Neck area. Speaker Schwartzkopf and Senator Lopez provided \$50K from CTF funds to pay for the study. Ray hopes to be able to share some of the feasibility study at a future meeting. The study will look at traffic patterns in the area, the need for facilities, the size of facilities that are needed, and will provide the group with renderings that will be helpful for fundraising. Ron Mears suggested that pickle ball courts be located beyond the gate so the Division can collect entry fees to offset the costs of maintaining the area. Ray stated that the Wolfe Neck parking area requires a payment already so if the courts end up in that area, the fee requirement is in place. Ron Mears asked if there would be a fee booth placed there. Ray stated that self-registration is required now but that we hope to install a fee machine there. Ron then asked if there is a need for another pickle ball court at Lums Pond. Ray said the Division is considering putting a court in at the park on Lovering Avenue in the City of Wilmington. The park is located across from a senior center and currently houses three tennis courts in need of overhauling and a basketball court that gets some usage. Representative Brady requested a meeting to talk about those courts and the park superintendent at Wilmington State Parks thinks this might be a good site for pickle ball. The Division does not need three tennis courts anymore so we will also explore the potential for "foot soccer" at this site. This sport is popular with the young Latino community and allows people that can't get out to a large soccer field to play the sport in an urban/confined setting. This site may end up with a basketball/tennis/pickle ball/foot soccer area. This could be a very expensive project because of the accessibility limitations in the area. The Division needs to do something because the courts are in very bad shape.

Matt Chesser stated that during the master plan survey at Auburn Heights, there were a lot of "write ins" about pickle ball and Ray said the SCORP will specifically ask about pickle ball. A temporary pickle ball court will be available at this year's Yorklyn Festival. A "user survey" will be done to see if there is a market for pickle ball in the area. Ron Mears asked if there was a possibility of pickle ball at Deerfield; Matt said probably not because they have paddle tennis there. Ray stated that the heated paddle tennis area is a pretty big investment and is popular so it will probably remain as is. Matt said depending on what the survey reveals, the Division may install pickle ball in other areas throughout the park system. Ron Breeding asked if the Division had been in contact with Schell Brothers

regarding their huge open space. Ray stated that he believes that the First State Pickle Ball Club is talking with them. Ray explained that Sussex County is giving a loan/grant to a non-profit organization that Schell Brother put up. They are going to build a sports complex with multipurpose fields and some pickle ball courts.

Joe Smack stated that he saw the Pickle Ball Championships on ESPN and was fascinated by it. The championships took place outside of Phoenix. Jim White stated that he was in Florida and that every place he went, all of the communities had pickle ball courts. It was very popular.

IX. New Business

The annual election of officers was held. Joe Smack nominated Ron Mears as Chairman of the Park Council. Ed Lewandowski seconded the motion. The chairman asked for additional nominations; Ron Breeding made a motion that nomination be closed. The chairman called for a vote and Ron Mears was unanimously voted as the continuing Chairman of the Council.

Joe Smack nominated Ron Breeding for Vice Chairman of the Council. Clyde Shipman seconded the nomination. The chairman called for a vote and the motion carried unanimously. Ron Breeding will continue to serve as the Vice Chairman of the Council.

Clyde shared the newspaper article regarding the upcoming public workshop/hearing to discuss the carrying of weapons in State Parks. Wayne Kline and Ray talked about the lawsuit and the decision by the Supreme Court to allow guns in Delaware State Parks. Secretary Garvin is implementing emergency regulations to restrict the open carrying of weapons in sensitive areas within State Parks. Concealed carrying would not be restricted. The regulations would allow law enforcement officers to request legal documentation from visitors who are carrying on park lands. Clyde asked if the Division/Department can restrict concealed carrying too. Ray said that would require legislation.

The Division/Department is currently trying to determine the best places to post signs regarding these emergency regulations. Discussion centered-around how the lawsuit came about and why the Division/Department can't restrict this further. Ray shared that the Department, along with the Attorney General's office is "trying to determine" what this means for DNREC. Wayne shared that other park systems in the USA have had issues with weapons in the park when dealing with controversial groups. The National Park Service has conformed to whatever regulation the local State adheres to.

Ed Lewandowski asked about the offshore wind project. Ray said he attended a meeting with the Energy Office to discuss the project in Ocean City and the possibility of bringing a power line to the Indian River Power Plant. This line would need to come "through and under" Delaware Seashore State Park. This would require a boring and the line would come up through one of our parking lots (Savage's Ditch) and then run to the power plant. Visitor use of the parking lot would continue. For this to happen, the Division would need to provide an easement not unlike current easements we have with other utility companies. At this point, the Energy Office is just exploring options but Ray shared that his preference would be connecting Fort Delaware to the mainland as part of the compensation package.

Connecting Fort Delaware to the mainland would allow the Division to have security on the island and then the solar system would transfer energy back into the grid.

X. Upcoming Events

Ray shared the upcoming events with the Council and invited them to attend. The Governor and the Secretary will be at Parks School and will address the group. Tourism Director Linda Parkowski will be announcing the results of the economic impact study. The DRPS Conference is coming up and this event is for all park agencies in the State. Ron Breeding has won the “grand award” for this group.

The JFC Hearing is next week. Ron Mears invited Council members to attend.

XI. Meeting Adjournment

The chairman called for a motion to adjourn. Brenda Bramble made a motion to adjourn, Jim White seconded the motion. The meeting adjourned at 11:42 a.m.